

VZCZCXRO8073  
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHBC #0104/01 3091403  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
P R 051403Z NOV 07  
FM REO BASRAH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0633  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0216  
INFO RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEPGAB/MNF-I C2X BAGHDAD  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE  
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0667

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000104

SIPDIS

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/5/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRANIAN FRONT GROUP COMES OUT OF THE SHADOWS

REF: A. A. TD 314/69042-07 (12 OCT 07)  
[1](#)B. B. TD 314/17343-07 (03 MAR 07)  
[1](#)C. C. TD 314/55060-07 (26 JUL 07)

BASRAH 00000104 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Louis L. Bono, Director, Regional Embassy Office  
- Basrah, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (c), (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: Leaders of Sayyid al-Shuhada (translated as 'Lord of the Martyrs'), an Iraqi Shia party with close ties to Iranian intelligence, met with Regional Embassy Officers (REO) on November 3. They told us this was an introductory meeting to dispel rumors of their Iranian ties, nefarious activities, and that they wanted to cooperate with the U.S. However, they blamed the U.S. and Gulf States for "forcing" them to Iran after the Iraqi Marsh Arab revolt and referred to U.S. forces as "occupiers." They stressed they were no longer militants, but a legitimate political party. They noted their good relations with the other local parties, but are at odds with Governor Mohammed Wa'eli (Fadhila Party). They suggested the REO might act as an intermediary among Basrah's parties, and seek to maintain relations. End Summary.

Lord of the Martyrs  
-----

[1](#)2. (S/NF) According to U.S. intelligence, Sayyid al-Shuhada (SAS) is an Iranian front organization. It was formed as an opposition group against Saddam Hussein in 1991 when Iraqis fled to Iran during a Marsh Arab revolt. With the collapse of Saddam's regime in 2003, the group returned to Iraq. Members receive salaries and orders from of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) (ref A). SAS resembles Lebanese Hizbollah: a political party with charitable organizations that gathers intelligence, smuggles lethal aid, and conducts limited attacks under Iranian direction. As a Shia fundamentalist group, they have close ties to Thar Allah, Badr Organization, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, 15 Sha'ban, and Hizbollah Movement. Iraqi parliamentarian, Sayyid Daghir al-Musawi, is the Secretary General and believed to be an IRGC-QF Brigadier General.

WE'RE NOT AS BAD AS YOU THINK  
-----

¶3. (S/NF) On November 3, we met with members of SAS who identified themselves as Deputy Secretary General (and brother of Sayyid Daghir) Hilal Na'im, Political Office Director and Basrah Provincial Council member Qasim al-Fayad, and Head of Organizations As'ad Khaliaf. Hilal said this was an introductory meeting, but they wanted to cooperate with the U.S. From the outset, Hilal sought to dispel the "negative rumors" about SAS, stressed their independence from Iran, and "challenged anyone to show evidence SAS has attacked U.S. or UK forces."

#### REVISIONIST HISTORY

-----

¶4. (S/NF) Hilal explained how the group was formed out of the 1991 uprising, but was originally called the Islamic Organization in the Marsh Area. He criticized the U.S. for mistakes during the 1991 Gulf War and "supplying Saddam with weapons" that allowed Saddam to oppress the Marsh Arabs. He also blamed the Gulf States for closing their borders to Iraqi refugees, and the U.S. for not intervening, thus forcing them to flee to Iran. He lamented how hard it was for them in Iran: they were forced into a country they had fought against, they had no jobs, and they did not speak Farsi. "If Iraqis could have fled to the Arab Gulf States, there would be less Iranian influence in Iraq today," he said. He said that initially Coalition Forces were viewed as "rescuers" for ousting Saddam, but after several mistakes, Iraqis view us as "occupiers."

#### LOOKING FOR LEGITIMACY & TELLING US WHAT WE WANT TO HEAR

-----

¶5. (S/NF) Our interlocutors stressed that after returning to Iraq in 2003, they changed their name to SAS, gave up their weapons and became a "legitimate political party." They characterized SAS as a moderate-Islamic, nationalist party that supported Iraq's government and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. They claimed to respect the rule of law, denounce terrorists,

BASRAH 00000104 002.2 OF 002

and support Iraqi Security Forces. Locally, they said SAS funded charities for orphans and the poor, as well as "cultural institutions" around Basrah's neglected outskirts to educate people (ref B). They also said SAS wants to promote economic growth and improve services. Internationally, they sought better relations with Iraq's neighbors and the U.S., as well as improving Iraqi's image in the international community.

#### ALL POLITICS ARE LOCAL

-----

¶6. (S/NF) Hilal said, however, they were disappointed in Basrah's ISF leadership, citing their poor performance during the October 23 confrontation with Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). He opined that ISF leaders showed weakness negotiating with JAM, which would only embolden militias to commit further violence. All of them said relations with the other political parties, including Fadhila, were good, but they said Governor Wa'eli (Fadhila) was corrupt and failed to deliver public services. They said that during the Provincial Council's efforts to oust Wa'eli, they suggested replacing him with another Fadhila member, but Fadhila refused. Tensions continue between SAS and Wa'eli, but they recently agreed to work together on improving services and maintaining their dialogue. They also suggested that the REO act as an intermediary between SAS and other parties to eliminate any conflicts.

#### ESTABLISHING A CONTINUING DIALOGUE

-----

¶7. (S/NF) The REO Director thanked Hilal for the background on SAS, but corrected his historical inaccuracies regarding the USG's role in Iraq. As they were willing to meet again, we suggested future discussions on specific political, economic, security, and social issues. Hilal nearly jumped out of his seat at the mention of militias saying, "That's what we need to

discuss first!"

COMMENT

-----

¶8. (S/NF) It is not yet clear if SAS is actually distancing itself from Iran or just claiming to as a means of establish increased legitimacy. Additional meetings will be required to fully assess their intentions. For this first meeting they kept to their script - persuade us they were moderates and not Iranian puppets. It may be a trend; Badr and some Sadrist leaders have also told us they are seeking to transform into legitimate political entities, and Badr leader Hasan al-Rashid has emphasized Badr's independence from Iran. It was obvious they were not prepared to discuss much else, and they seemed surprised that we were very receptive to their overture, rather than wary of their motives, as they may have expected.

¶9. (S) As their name suggests, and comments indicated, SAS has something of a martyr's complex having suffered at the hands of Saddam's regime, foreign powers, and possibly Iran. This was reinforced when they complained other parties did not take them seriously having given SAS only one seat on the Council of Representatives and in the Provincial Council. End comment.

OBSERVATIONS

-----

¶10. (S) The personal information provided by the three is consistent with U.S. intelligence (refs A & C). Their known names are: (1) Hilal Na'im al-Musawi (aka Hasan Jasim Kazim Jafar al-Musawi, Jafar al-Musawi, Abu Jafar al-Musawi), possibly an IRGC-QF Colonel and the brother of Daghir Jasim Kadhim Sharif al-Musawi; (2) Qasim Muhammad al-Fayad; and (3) Isa'd Khaliaf. It was clear that Hilal dominated their delegation (others deferred to him), and at some points, he even interrupted them so they would not stray off message or divulge too much. We are certain all three understand English to some degree - As'ad probably better than the others.

BONO